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A study was made of fictional works in children's literature of the past century to establish the possible relationships between themes of children's stories and the political, social, and cultural events in American society from 1850 to 1964. The six themes which consistently appeared concerned the problems of growing up, the search for values, travel and people in foreign lands, lives of heroes, fun and fairy tales, and the desire to know. The popularity of these themes fluctuated according to historical climate--e.g., Horatio Alger stories and didactic books were popular during such times of national turmoil as the Civil War; the "urge to know" books were popular during the development of social consciousness around the turn of the century; and fun stories and fairy tales were popular during times of prosperity. (A bibliography on children's literature is included.) (MP)

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JEAN DUNCAN SHAW

Children's Fiction and American History

The carvings of the cave men, the Indian cryptographs, and Egyptian hieroglyphics are evidences of the desires of men to leave a record of their existence. The Bible provides many examples, from the answer to the child's Passover question, "Why is this night different from all other nights in the year," when the story of deliverance is recounted, to the New Testament use of parables and the final admonition of Jesus, "This do in remembrance of me."

American culture has been reflected in its literature, and a number of historians and sociologists, V. L. Parrington, Merle Curti, and more recently Max Lerner, David Reisman and Vance Packard, among others, have traced the growth of thought in this country. Their writings have, however, dealt with adult literature. Many stories intended originally for adults have moved into the children's field, particularly the legends and folk tales, while some children's books, such as Kieth's *Rifles for Watie*, Speare's *The Bronze Bow* and de-Angeli's *The Door in the Wall*, have real interest for adults. Considering the flexibility of any imaginary boundaries between children's and adults' stories, and the desire of a culture to pass experience and values to oncoming generations, it then seems reasonable that there exists a relationship between the historical, social, and cultural advancement of a society and the themes of stories written for its children.

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Identification of themes

On this premise a study has been made of themes recurrent in children's literature in America from 1850 to 1964. Major texts in the field were studied in order to determine recognizable themes which had been characteristic of children's stories. From these texts, and after consulting with experts in the field, and with particular assistance from Carolyn Field, Coordinator of Work with Children at the Philadelphia Free Library and members of her staff, six categories were organized which seemed to cover the themes in children's books. Only fiction was included; poetry, biography, factual books were not surveyed:

- I. *The Search for Values*, to include moral tales, morality stories, spiritual literature, Bible-based stories, religions of the world, saints and heroes in a search for values, patriotism, religious holidays.
- II. *Problems of Growing Up*, to include role determination, stories about girls, the need for material security, realistic fiction, vocation-oriented stories, acceptance, the need to belong, family stories, special problems.
- III. *Travel and Understanding People in Foreign Lands*, to include advice for travel abroad, neighbors around the world, children of other lands, life in foreign lands.
- IV. *Lives of Heroes—The Desire to Achieve—Overcoming Great Odds*, to include saints and evildoers, swashbuckling heroes, folk tales of heroes, biographical fiction, fables, myths and legends,

war stories, cowboy and frontier stories, success, sports and adventure stories, school stories, conquering fear.

- V. *Fun and Fairy Tales* to include the need for change, modern fantasy, mystery stories, magic, imaginative, romantic adventures, humorous books, nonsense, tall tales, holiday stories.
- VI. *The Urge to Know*, to include historical fiction, nature stories, science fiction, people and events of the past, glorified America.

The popularity of the different themes has varied over the years and it is possible to trace a relationship between predominant themes and major social, economic, and cultural events in American history.

The didactic years and Alger

During the years 1850-1865 when the search for values was the most popular type of children's book, the French enlightenment influences were waning, but laissez-faire economic policies were still in effect. Aristocracy was declining and the political climate was brewing the violent reactions which erupted during and after the Civil War. The name of Jacob Abbott dominated the field of children's books until 1856 and appeared less frequently from then until 1866. His stories about Rollo and the books labeled "Abbott's Moral Library" are all highly didactic in nature, and were so popular that he kept several publishers busy at one time in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. Other smaller surges in popularity of books in the "Search for Values" category show up during the period 1914-1919, completely coincidental with World War I and the war-induced lag in the liberalizing movement. These stories were frequently re-told Biblical tales or such reassuring titles as *Georgina of the Rainbows* or *You Are the Hope of the World!*

Another slight rise in popularity of the "values" books is indicated in 1936, and this influence remains at a fairly constant level

through the end of the depression, World War II, the beginning of the Atomic Age and the establishment of the United Nations. A new type of story shows up during these years in the concern for the way children face difficult problems in stories like *Blue Willow*, *Call It Courage*, *The Hundred Dresses*, and *The Door in the Wall*. A slight decline in popularity appears in the middle 1950's, possibly affected by the greatly increasing interest in science caused by Russia's launching of Sputnik. The shift within the category, from more strictly religious stories to those indicating a concern for others and patriotic values, has already been pointed out with such stories as *In My Mother's House*, *Little Navajo Bluebird*, *Pedro . . . of Olvera Street*, *LiLun*, *Lad of Courage*, and *Song of the Swallow*. Open conflict on racial problems did not erupt in this country until the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960's, but children's books were being written around this theme many years earlier, with a real concentration showing up in the 1940's. Many of these books appear in the category on "growing up."

During the post-Civil War years a factory oriented economy was emergent, agriculture was beginning to be mechanized, and the plantation economy was dying in the south. It was an acquisitive age, the one of preemption, exploitation, and progress; of political "bossism" and undisciplined freedom. As "values" books were subsiding in popularity during this decade, the two themes involving stories for girls and the problems of growing up and achieving material security, and the adventurous boys' books with promise of success-through-industry, were rising in popularity. The Horatio Alger books led during the forty years 1865-1905, with Alger replacing Abbott as the name most frequently encountered in children's books. The themes dealing with success through industry con-

tinued to lead in popularity through the period of folk heroes; indeed, the Alger boys became, themselves, stereotypes of folk heroes. *Ben, the Luggage Boy; Paul, the Peddler; Phil, the Fiddler; Mack, the Match Boy; Julius, the Street Boy; Frank Fowler, the Cash Boy; Tom, the Bootblack; Tony, the Hero; Dan, the Newsboy; and Nelson, the Newsboy* were only a few of the lads he took from poverty to riches. It would appear that it was easier to find names than suitable occupations. In the 1880's the unrestricted immigration brought many people to America whose rapid rise in fortune seemed to prove that these stories were almost believable.

Real life and the Wizard coexist

At the turn of the century, during a period of increased urbanization, when concern for the welfare of the laboring man was resulting in a social conscience and the "muckrakers" were concerned with the changing national values, the "lives of heroes" stories continued to grow in popularity and the "values" books hit a long lag that continued until 1914. The "urge to know" increased rapidly in popularity during this period and styles in all categories became more realistic. Castlemon, Henty, and Stratemeyer (both in his own name and as Victor Appleton) were producing numerous highly adventurous stories with a basis in historical fact. Children's books began to become more realistic at almost the same time adult novels moved in this direction.

Before World War I the middle class society dominated the American scene. An interest in collectivism and Marxism was stirring within this society, but capitalism was still "the American way." Very few books were being written on either the "values" themes or on any travel or foreign topics. Highest of all in popularity were the success stories and history-related adven-

tures. Fairy tales and fantasies had a rapid rise in popularity during 1900-1910, dipped during the war years, and recovered high interest from 1917-1929. L. Frank Baum's *Wizard of Oz* books: *New Wizard of Oz, The Land of Oz, Ozma of Oz, Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz, The Road to Oz, The Emerald City of Oz, The Scarecrow of Oz, Rinki Tink in Oz, The Lost Princess of Oz, The Magic of Oz, Glinda of Oz, Kabumpo in Oz, The Cowardly Lion of Oz, The Hungry Tiger of Oz, The Giant Horse of Oz* and *Pirates of Oz!* spanned the years 1903 to 1931. Andrew Lang produced nine fairy story books of various colors, and Hugh Lofting followed Baum's stories of his imaginary land with almost as many variations of Dr. Doolittle.

More "values" books were written during the World War I years with patriotism as a theme, and books about foreign countries had their first significant rise in popularity since 1880. Eulalie O. Grover's *Sunbonnet Babies* and *Overall Boys* and Lucy Fitch Perkins . . . *Twins* books were produced then. Girls' books hit a low point, but the "lives of heroes" stories were most popular. *Tarzan of the Apes* began his many adventures in 1914 and maintained his virility over sixty years and through the various media of radio, cartoon strips, motion pictures, and television. The *Rover Boys* (Stratemeyer again), *Boy Scouts*, and *Mark Tidd* were products of the years 1914-1919. Fairy tales continued to appear as did stories involving the urge to know.

Horizons widen and knowledge expands

Soon after World War I, the nation suffered a reaction against internationalism. This seemed to indicate a determination not to be involved in world affairs rather than a lack of interest in other countries, for books about travel and foreign countries were popular from 1918 until the early depression years. Europe remained the most

popular place for travel stories, but some books began to appear about more exotic lands: Mukerji's *Kari, the Elephant, Chief of the Herd; Ghond, the Hunter; Jungle, Beasts and Man; Pearl Lagoon*, and *Hari, the Jungle Lad* came from these years, as did *A Daughter of the Samurai, Chi-Wee and Loki, Snake Gold, Black Folk Tales, Girls in Africa, Kullu of the Carts, Kullu and the Elephant, Garram the Hunter and Little Pear*. The "roaring twenties" was a period of low popularity in "values" books, of decline in an interest in problems of material security or the success stories. It was a very prosperous age and interest was high in fun and fairy tales. The same irresponsible gaiety that earned the era its label may have shown up in this way among juveniles. The charming talking-animals of Thornton Burgess were highly popular. The Oz and Doolittle books were high in popularity and were joined by Uncle Wiggily and the Winnie-the-Pooh stories. In addition to these fairy tales in series, other fun and fantasy books were written. *Little Black Sambo* was probably the one to achieve longest fame.

While religious fundamentalism and science were battling in the Stokes trial and Lindbergh was successfully flying across the ocean, many children's books about the new knowledges were being written. Historical fiction remained high in popularity, but stories like *Living Forest* and *Smoky the Cowhorse* and *Jimmy, A Black Bear Cub* were demonstrating a concern for honest scientific background on which to build the fictional tale.

New values from recent events

The shock of the stock market crash and the trauma of the depression years were paralleled in children's literature with a big surge in books dealing with problems of growing up, need for security, and school and family stories. Rachel Field, Laura

Ingalls Wilder, Margery Bianco, Stephen Meader, Eliza Orne White were only a few of the authors who wrote several books dealing with the problems of children. An interest in foreign lands continued, but even here the stories tended to be centered around a main character and the problems faced in the foreign country were frequently ones with which American children could identify. The interest in Asian, African, and South American children increased and the names of Ping, Young Fu, Jotey, Ho Ming, Niki, Paulo, Kentu, Chiyo, and Boomba joined the more familiar European ones of Peter and Katrinka and Dobry. Fairy tales declined slightly, but were still being written, possibly as juvenile escape literature. Fact related books increased in popularity, but the swash-buckling heroes and the success stories lost popularity; the triumph of a right-minded, industrious young man over adversity did not seem as plausible during the dark depression days.

A revival of interest in a search for values was taking place in children's books at the same time that World War II, the use of the atom bomb and the founding of the United Nations were occurring. The stories for children seemed almost predictive in this category, in fact; for the idea of universal brotherhood appeared in children's books for more than ten years before overt civil rights action appeared on the national political scene.

Books on themes related to the need for acceptance as well as material security, problems of family living and of role determination began a climb in popularity that has continued to increase to the present. Series books featured family life and problems: *The Moffats, The Mitchells, The Pages*, and Beverly Cleary's "Henry" and "Beezus" stories and Caroline Haywood's "Betsy" and "Eddie," were all family-centered. Margery Bianco's *Other People's*

Houses, Lenski's concern for *Bayou Suzette*, *Strawberry Girl*, and others, Gates' *Blue Willow* and Angeli's *Bright April* and Krumgold's *And Now Miguel* were examples of the increasing sensitivity to the problems of the culturally different children.

These continued to increase in popularity during the years of the assassination of President Kennedy, the concern about population explosion, and internal political problems of labor and civil rights. Highly romantic heroes and adventures subsided in popularity and continued to decline during the years of the Korean conflict, Russia's emergence as a scientific power, and the more recent events in Africa, China, and Vietnam. Actual happenings were so colorful that the newspapers told more tales of adventure than the book authors invented.

American children were reading about people in foreign countries during World War II and the necessity for peaceful co-existence kept this interest high after the war. An affluent society had money for travel, and books in this category maintained a steady level of interest. Bettina, Marcia Brown, Kurt Weise, Meindert DeJong, Pepiti, Yashimo, and Ann Clark Nolan were only a few authors who wrote several books on foreign themes.

The category that seems most consistently to reflect periods of prosperity is fun and fairy tales. *Charlotte's Web*, *Mr. Revere and I*, a 1954 reprint of *The Wind in the Willows*, the stories of Green Knowe, *The Hundred and One Dalmatians*, the *Borrowers* stories, *A Cricket in Times Square*, and *A Wrinkle in Time* represent a different kind of fantasy story that has been emerging in the past ten years. These kinds of books were steadily popular during the war but rose even higher during the 1950's when politically and economically the country was seeing an increasing socialization in government.

Historical and science fiction, particularly space fiction were very popular during World War II and the subsequent mushrooming of scientific progress. *The Angry Planet*, *Space Cadet*, *Red Planet: A Colonial Boy on Mars*, *Moon Ahead*, *Miss Pickereell Goes to Mars*, *The Wonderful Flight to the Mushroom Planet*, *The Lost Planet*, and *Space Cat Meets Mars* were only some of the space fiction books written between the end of World War II and the launching of Sputnik. There has been a continuing interest since that event. Most recently the most popular themes for children's books have been the problems of growing up with such books as *Onion John*, *Meet the Austins*, the Barkham Street stories, and *Roosevelt Grady* as well as the fun and fairy tales and "urge to know" books already cited.

Some styles maintain popularity

Some types of children's books have continued to appeal to children over hundreds of years; for instance, a new book of riddles by Ennis Rees, *Riddles, Riddles Everywhere* was published in 1964; and Sloane listed a *Booke of Meery Riddles* published in 1629. Nursery rhymes have also persisted; the 1965 Children's Catalog lists a reprint of "Dame Wiggins of Lee," printed first in 1823.

A new edition of Andersen's fairy tale, *The Nightingale*, appears in 1962. Charles Dickens' *Christmas Carol* is in print in 1963, and Frank Stockton's *The Bee-man of Arn*, first published in 1887, appears again in 1963 as indications of the continuing popularity of fairy tales. Even the many-colored fairy books of Andrew Lang have been revived recently by Kathleen Lines in *Fifty Favorite Fairy Tales*, published in 1963.

Conclusion

Dora V. Smith stated in *Fifty Years of Children's Books* that "Books have kept

pace with the children's world and . . . the need to know . . . illuminating social, economic, and cultural influences on our national life." It is clear that the books written for children have varied in popularity as the need to know has grown, and that themes employed in writing for children have indeed illuminated social, economic, and cultural influences in America, to the extent, in the cases of civil liberties and the space race, of moving ahead of events. There have been no glaring inconsistencies between events and themes, and in some cases recurring conditions have consistently seen a recurring pattern in the stories for children, as in the case of three high prosperity periods showing coincidental high levels of popularity in fantasy stories. In books written for its children the social, economic and political thought of America has, indeed, been reflected.

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